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ABSTRACT

This guide presents a system for determining the gender of French nouns that has been tested against 12,000 pages of general reading: novels, history, social science, law, finance, and the Bible. The guide discusses the rules for determining gender and also presents various lists of the non-routine or exceptions to the rules. It is asserted that French nouns fit into 20 patterns that cut the gender-memory effort by at least 90-92%; the system's underlying principle is "management by exception": using patterns to isolate the non-routine nouns for special attention. The guide is organized into three "phases" of increasing difficulty or complexity: phase I discusses non-mute (-e) nouns, natural persons (individuals), general mute (-e) nouns, and mixed-consonant mute (-e) nouns; phase II covers nouns from adjectives, ellipsis, (-que) nouns, chemical elements and compounds; and phase III includes gender profiles, notes for further study and an advanced list of exceptions for businessmen, and the "why and how" of the mute (-e) masculines. (EJS)

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GUIDE TO FRENCH

NOUN GENDER

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by

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Guide to French Noun Gender

ERRATUM, page 22

Delete: la (ligne) bissectrice/perforatrice

Insert: la (ligne) bissectrice
la (machine) calculatrice/perforatrice

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1) Introduction

People who know French well have a "feel" or sixth sense for noun gender. For many, however, gender is an irrational, random nuisance.

Actually, French nouns fit into 20 patterns. The patterns do for noun gender what was done long ago for French verbs. Measured against the patterns, the nouns in basic word lists and dictionaries are 90 - 92% "regular."

The other nouns are "exceptions." The high-frequency exceptions make up a basic list roughly equivalent to 11 irregular verbs (in four simple tenses).

Businessmen, civil servants and social scientists do not need the basic list for their work. They can start with a mini-list.

The mini-list does not cover the same vocabulary as tourists' phrase books. The phrase book concentrates on ordering meals, specialty shopping, and automotive and medical distress.

The mini-list has a "news" vocabulary, and concentrates on people, ideas and events. It deemphasizes physical things and substances. The mini-list is the rough equivalent of seven irregular verbs. It is part of the basic list.

The basic list has most of the exceptions encountered in first-year college courses. Additional exceptions occur infrequently. Once you know the basic list, you can continue with gender on much the same casual basis as the francophone.

Gender is a grammar link for nouns, adjectives, articles, pronouns and participles. Gender is not taught, but it still must be learned.

The Guide is not a substitute for practice. It is intended to make practice more effective.

In a magazine or newspaper, you can expect between five and 20 recurring exceptions beyond the basic list. The same holds true for general books up to about 400 pages. "Recurring" means appearing on more than one page per reading selection.

The Guide's system has been tested against 12,000 pages of general reading (including novels, history, social science, law, finance and the Bible).

The underlying principle is "management by exception" - using patterns to isolate the non-routine for special attention. The 20 patterns cut the gender-memory effort for basic vocabularies by some 90 - 92%, and the ongoing effort (in terms of frequency and usage) by much, much more.

The Guide is divided into three phases: I - "First"; II - "Later"; and III - "In Time." As indicated by their titles, phases II and III can wait.

PHASE I - "FIRST"

2) Non-Mute (-e) Nouns

French has a gender system keyed mainly to noun endings. Nouns ending in a Mute (-e) are usually feminine. The other nouns, the Non-Mute (-e) nouns, are usually masculine.

Within the Non-Mute (-e) nouns, there are four feminine groups with special endings. The feminine groups have the following special endings:

1) (-sion)(-tion), etc.
2) (-ison)
3) (-eur) "S-Q-C"*
& Moisture
4) (-té)(-tié)

* "States, Qualities, Conditions"

The first group includes words like:

la confusion	la condition	la suspicion
la division	la nation	la religion
la dimension	la question	l' opinion(f)
la version	la section	la réflexion

There are only a few nouns, like those in the right-hand column, ending in (-cion)(-gion) (-nion) and (-xion). Most of these feminines end in (-sion) or (-tion), like the nouns in the first two columns.

The other (-ion) nouns in French are usually masculine, like le million, le camion and l' avion(m).

The (-ison) group includes words like:

la combinaison	la maison	la raison
la liaison	la prison	la saison

The (-eur) feminines are mostly nouns indicating state, quality or condition. They also include four types of moisture: la liqueur, la moiteur, la sueur and la vapeur. Here are examples of the feminines indicating state, quality or condition:

la blancheur whiteness	la lourdeur heaviness	la rigueur strictness
l' erreur(f) error	les moeurs(f) habits	la tumeur swelling
la faveur favor	la peur fear	la valeur value
l' humeur(f) temper	la rancoeur bitterness	la vigueur force

The (-té)(-tié) group includes words like:

la beauté	la fierté	la pitié
la cité	la liberté	la qualité
la faculté	la moitié	la société
la fraternité	la nécessité	la verité

Aside from the feminine groups, the Non-Mute (-e) nouns are mostly masculine. Here are some examples, typical of the early chapters in first-year grammars:

l' achat(m)	l' examen(m)	l' opéra(m)
le bateau	le fauteuil	le papier
le crayon	l' hiver(m)	le radiateur
le début	l' instrument(m)	le sens
l' état(m)	le jour	le travail
le fruit	le lac	le vêtement
le gouvernement	le milieu	l' appel(m)
l' hôtel(m)	le numéro	le bain
l' intérêt(m)	le pays	le congé
le jardin	le quartier	le cinéma
le lit	le repos	le drapeau
le magasin	le vent	le film
le nom	l' an(m)	le journal
l' objet(m)	le besoin	le mot
le prix	le choix	l' oeil(m)
le restaurant	le danger	le pain
le soleil	le fait	le secret
le tableau	le goût	le secteur
le roman	l' hôpital(m)	le sommeil
l' argent(m)	le juillet	le sujet
le bureau	le logement	le tapis
le château	le mois	le temps
le droit	le nez	le veston

These are the "left-overs" or remainder of the Non-Mute (-e) nouns after separating out the feminine groups.

Among French nouns, there are several word forms that have different genders depending on the meaning. For example, le tour and

la tour; le merci and la merci.

Nouns which are part of a "gender-pair" are listed as follows: la tour(PAIR), la merci (PAIR). Noun-pair status is not shown, however, when the other noun is not in ordinary usage.

The Non-Mute (-e) nouns have about 20% of the exceptions on the basic list. Mastery of the Non-Mute (-e) nouns is not difficult, and offers a bargain for the effort involved.

3) Natural Persons

Most nouns for natural persons (individuals) conform to the ending patterns for nouns generally, but sometimes you have to apply a back-up pattern (or rule), as follows:

a) Female Feminine: where there is a special female connotation, nouns for natural persons are feminine regardless of ending;
b) General Masculine: other nouns for natural persons are masculine regardless of ending, with the notable exception of la personne(PAIR) and la victime.

The back-up rule "takes care of" natural persons (and domesticated animals), such as:

*l' homme(m)	la femme
*le frère	*la soeur
*le père	la mère
le papa	*la maman
le cheval	*la jument
le mouton	*la brebis
*le député	---
*l' invité(m)	l' invitée(f)

The nouns marked by asterisks do not conform

to the noun-ending patterns, and would be exceptions but for the back-up rule.

Until gender becomes second nature, there is no way to avoid this mental "two-step." The back-up rule for natural persons helps mainly with masculines ending in Mute (-e), such as l' homme(m), le frère, and le père. The difficult part of French gender is the Mute (-e) masculine.

4) Non-Mute (-e) Nouns: Mini-List of Exceptions, Part I

Here now is the mini-list of exceptions for the Non-Mute (-e) nouns:

A) SPECIAL ENDINGS

(-sion)(-tion), etc.	---
(-ison)	---
(-eur) "S-Q-C"	le bonheur*, l' honneur(m)*
& Moisture	le pleur
(-té)(-tié)	le comité, le côté l' été(m), le traité

B) REMAINDER

la clef (clé), la soif
la faim
la rébellion
la boisson (moisson), la façon*(leçon), la fin, les gens(SPEC), la main
la fleur
la cour, la mer, la tour(PAIR)
la fois
la forêt, la mort(PAIR), la nuit (but le minuit), la part (plupart)
l' interview(f)
la paix, la voix

la caméra, la villa
la foi, la loi, le merci(PAIR)
l' eau(f), la vertu

* le malheur, le déshonneur, la contrefaçon, la malfaçon
(SPEC) before the noun, certain adjectives are feminine, such as, les bonnes vieilles gens; otherwise, the noun is masculine.
also, note the following abbreviations: la télé for la télé(vision), l' auto(f) for l' auto(mobile)(f), la météo for la météo(rologie), la moto for la moto(cyclette), la photo for la photo(graphie) and la radio for la radio(telegraphie, etc.)

To practice with the Non-Mute (-e) nouns, select a magazine article, newspaper page or word list, and underline the "regular" examples and draw a box around the exceptions.

For the time being, however, do not worry about the nouns for natural persons. There will be more on them later.

5) General Mute (-e) Nouns

Most Mute (-e) nouns are feminine. Here are some examples, again typical of the early chapters in first-year grammars:

l' année(f)	l' industrie(f)	la république
l' idée(f)	la partie	la revue
la journée	la vie	la rue
	la bibliothèque	
la salle	la terre	la classe
la ville	l' addresse(f)	la jeunesse
la robe	la barrière	la crise
la pièce	la culture	l' église(f)
la place	la frontière	la phrase
la période	l' heure(f)	la surprise
l' école(f)	la lecture	l' autoroute(f)
l' île(f)	la lumière	la boîte
la cuisine	la matière	la côte
l' origine(f)	la nature	la dispute

la semaine	la voiture	la faute
l' usine(f)	la chose	la minute
la soupe		la tête

In the list above, the first set of nouns has a vowel before the Mute (-e). The second set has a repeat-consonant before the Mute (-e). The third set has a single consonant.

Missing are nouns that have two different consonants before the Mute (-e), like le nombre, le siècle, l' ordre(m), l' exemple(m), le théâtre and le livre(PAIR). The Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) nouns require special handling. They are not counted as General Mute (-e) nouns.

Within the General Mute (-e) nouns, there are six masculine groups with special endings. The masculine groups have the following special endings:

1) (-ogue)
2) (-Vge)
3) (-Vme)
4) (-aire)(-oire)
5) (-ère)
6) (-Vxe)(-ice*)

The "V" symbol in (-Vge), (-Vme) and (-Vxe) stands for any vowel, so a (-Vge) ending can be (-age), (-ège), (-ige), etc. The asterisk in (-ice*) is a reminder that female natural persons are not included, as in the l' acteur(m), l' actrice(f) combination.

The (-ogue) group includes words like:

l' analogue(m)	le dialogue	le prologue
le catalogue	le pédagogue	(s) sociologue

The (-Vge) group includes words like:

l' avantage(m)	le fromage	le privilège
le collège	le mirage	le refuge

le déluge	le paysage	le siège
l' étage(m)	le prestige	le voyage

The (-Vme) group includes words like:

l' atome(m)	le diplôme	le poème
le centime	le drame	le problème
le costume	l' idiome(m)	le système
le crime	le légume	le volume

The (-aire)(-oire) group includes words like:

l' annuaire(m)	le glossaire	le pourboire
le contraire	le laboratoire	le sommaire
le directoire	le moratoire	le territoire
le faire	le nécessaire	le vocabulaire

The (-tère) group includes words like:

le caractère	l' hélicoptère	le monastère
le cratère	le ministère	le mystère
le critère		le presbytère

The (-Vxe)(-ice*) group includes words like:

le complexe	le bénéfice	le préjudice
le luxe	le caprice	le sacrifice
le paradoxe	l' exercice(m)	le service
le réflexe	l' indice(m)	le vice

So much for examples of - 1) the General Mute (-e) feminines, and 2) the masculine groups with special endings.

6) General Mute (-e) Nouns: Mini-List of Exceptions, Part II

Here now is the mini-list of exceptions for the General Mute (-e) nouns. Shown together first are nouns where the Mute (-e) is preceded

by another vowel or a repeat-consonant:

Multiple-Vowel & Repeat-Consonant

A) SPECIAL ENDING
(-ogue) la drogue, la vogue

B) REMAINDER
le lycée, le musée
l' incendie(m)
le chèque, le manque, le risque

l' intervalle(m), le portefeuille
le dilemme, le télégramme*
le tonnerre

Single-Consonant

A) SPECIAL ENDINGS
(-Vge) l' image(f), la neige, la page(PAIR), la rage
(-Vme) l' âme(f), l' amertume(f)(coutume), l' estime(f), (la prime*), la réclame
(-aire) l' affaire(f), la paire
(-oire) la foire, la gloire, l' histoire(f), (victoire), la mémoire(PAIR)
(-tère) ---
(-Vxe) la taxe*
(-ice*) la justice*, la police

B) REMAINDER
le globe
l' espace(m)
le code, l' épisode(m), le mode(PAIR), le remède*, le stade, le suicide*
le domicile, le missile, le modèle, le monopole*, le pétrole, le rôle (contrôle), le scandale, le scrupule, le style, le symbole, le véhicule, le zèle
le domaine, le magazine, l' organe(m), le patrimoine, le phénomène, le téléphone*
le groupe, le principe, le type*, le télescope*

le délire, l' empire(m), l' hectare(m),
le murmure, le navire
le malaise
le doute*, le mérite, le vote
le fleuve, le rêve

* le diagramme, le kilogramme, le programme, (la prime seems to involve ellipsis: la (partie/somme) prime - more on ellipsis later), la surtaxe, la syntaxe, l' injustice(f), l' intermède(m), l' homocide(m)(etc.), l' oligopole(m)(etc.), le magnétophone(etc.), le prototype(etc.), le microscope(etc.), (but la redoute)

When you master the General Mute (-e) nouns, you have done 70% of the basic list of exceptions.

7) Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) Nouns

The Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) nouns require special handling. There are four feminine groups with special endings, but the "left-overs" (remainder) are mainly masculine.

The feminine groups have the following special endings:

1) (-che)
2) (-gne)
3) (-mbe)(-mpe)
4) (-lKe)(-nKe)(-rKe)

The "K" symbol in (-lKe)(-nKe)(-rKe) stands for any consonant other than a repeat-consonant. An (-lKe) ending can be (-lde), (-lme), (-lpe), etc.

The (-che) group includes words like:

l' approche(f)	la flèche	la pêche
la branche	la marche	la planche

la cache	la moustache	la tâche
la douche	la niche	la tranche

The (-gne) groupe includes words like:

la besogne	la consigne	la montagne
la campagne	l' épargne(f)	la vergogne
la compagne	la ligne	la vigne

The (-mbe)(-mpe) group includes words like:

la bombe	la tombe	la pompe
les catacombes(f)	la crampe	la rampe
la colombe	l' estampe(f)	la tempe
la jambe	la lampe	la trempe

The (-lKe)(-nKe)(-rKe) group includes words like:

la catapulte	l' insulte(f)	la révolte
la guelte	la palme	la solde(PAIR)
la halte	la récolte	la valse
l' attente(f)	la danse	la récompense
la bande	la grange	la réponse
la chance	la honte	la vente
la crainte	la louange	la violence
l' auberge(f)	la discorde	la perle
la caserne	l' écharpe(f)	la porte
la charge	la forme	la source
la controverse	la larme	la verve

Aside from these groups with special endings, the Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) nouns are mostly masculine. Here are some examples, again typical of the early chapters in first-year grammars:

le décembre	le chiffre	le reste
le meuble	l' angle(m)	le chapitre
le trouble	le rhythme	le kilomètre
le muscle	l' automne(m)	le théâtre

l' obstacle(m)	l' exemple(m)	le texte
le siècle	le triomphe	le cuivre
l' ordre(m)	le mécanisme	le livre(PAIR)

So much for examples of - 1) the feminine groups with special endings, and 2) the Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) masculines.

8) Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) Nouns: Mini-List of Exceptions, Part III

Here now is the mini-list of exceptions for the Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) nouns:

A) SPECIAL ENDINGS

(-che) le dimanche, le reproche
(-gne) le signe*
(-mbe)
(-mpe) ---
(-lKe) le culte, le golfe, le solde(PAIR), le tumulte
(-nKe) le change*, le dividende, le genre, le mélange, le monde*, le silence, le songe (mensonge)
(-rKe) le charme, le commerce, le divorce, le terme

B) REMAINDER

la chambre, l' ombre*, la table*
l' acre(f)*
la foudre
l' offre(f)
la règle
la catastrophe*
la liste, la poste(PAIR)
la fenêtre, la lettre, la montre, la rencontre*
la fièvre, la livre(PAIR), l' oeuvre(f)(PAIR)*

* l' insigne(m)(but la consigne), l' échange(m), le rechange, (but la mappemonde), la pénombre, (but le cartable, le retable), (but le simul-

acre), la strophe, l' apostrophe(f), l' encontre(f), la manoeuvre(PAIR)

The Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e) nouns account for 24% of the basic list of exceptions. You are close to mastering the basics of French noun gender.

9) More About Natural Persons, incl. Mini-List, Part IV

Once again, most nouns for natural persons (individuals) conform to the ending patterns for nouns generally.

There is, however, a back-up pattern (rule) that "takes care of" the nouns that do not conform, principally masculines ending in Mute (-e):

a) Female Feminine: where there is a special female connotation, nouns for natural persons are feminine regardless of ending;
b) General Masculine: other nouns for natural persons are masculine regardless of ending, with the notable exception of la personne(PAIR) and la victime.

The General Masculine has a number of exceptions. Here now are the most important ones (and Part IV of the mini-list of exceptions):

General	la personne(PAIR) la victime (l' âme(f)) la connaissance la partie
Notables	la personnalité (also, célébrité, déité, divinité, notabilité) (cf., les autorités(f)

& les troupes, always in the plural)
la vedette (also, étoile & star)
l' idole(f)
Sa Majesté (also, Son Excellence, etc.)
la figure

Non-Notables
la bête(PAIR)
la brute
la dupe

Quasi-Military
l' ordonnance(f)
la recrue
la sentinelle

Originally, these nouns had some other meaning, but came to be used figuratively as natural persons without a change in gender (but cf., le radio(PAIR), l' aide(m)(PAIR), le guide (PAIR), l' enseigne(m)(PAIR), le garde(PAIR).

As a result, the gender of natural persons in French falls into three categories, as follows:

1) Female Feminine
2) General Masculine
3) Figurative Feminine

Next are examples of the Female Feminine-General Masculine "back-up" pattern in action. The examples demonstrate how the back-up pattern applies mainly to General Masculine nouns ending in Mute (-e):

Non-Mute (-e)	le député, l' initié(m)	
	l' invité(m), le retraité	
	la soeur	la brebis
	la bru	la jument
	la maman	
General Mute (-e)	(s) athée	
	le génie*	

(s) collègue
(s) Britannique, (s) catholique, le critique(PAIR), (s) cynique, (s) domestique, (s) ecclésiastique, l' évêque(m), (s) fanatique, le monarque, le romantique, le saltimbanque, (s) scientifique, (s) Soviétique

(s) rebelle
l' homme(m)
(s) gosse, (s) Russe, (s) Suisse

la dame (madame)

(s) Arabe, (s) (franco)phobe
l' aide(m)(PAIR), (s) camarade, le guide(PAIR), (s) invalide
(s) malade
le pontife
(s) fidèle, (s) (franco)phile, (s) imbécile, (s) incrédule
le capitaine, (s) indigène
(s) jeune, le moine
(s) misanthrope, le pape
(s) avare, le frère, le père
(s) aristocrate, (s) astronaute, l' athlète(m), (s) compatriote, le diplomate, l' hôte(m), (s) hypocrite, (s) interprète le pilote, le poète, le prophète, (s) technocrate
(s) brave, (s) convive, le détective, (s) élève, (s) esclave

Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e)

(s) lâche, (s) proche, (s) riche
l' ivrogne(m), l' enseigne(m)(PAIR)
(s) adulte, (s) Belge
l' ange(m), le prince
(s) concierge, le dramaturge, le garde(PAIR), le gendarme, (s) interne, (s) infirme, le subalterne

la nymphe, (s) dactylographe
la modiste
la chèvre

* though each now has several meanings, the following were originally natural persons: le génie (a divinity), le parasite (guest), le satellite (henchman).

These examples demonstrate more than the back-up pattern. They also demonstrate how many nouns come from adjectives, for example, (s) athée, (s) domestique, (s) rebelle, (s) Suisse, (s) Arabe, (s) invalide, (s) fidèle, (s) brave, (s) adulte. Masculine adjectives are a major source of masculine Mute (-e) nouns.

One last comment on nouns for natural persons. It is usually obvious when there is a "special female connotation," but not always.

There are a number of special usages, such as le mannequin for the female fashion model, (cf., la femme modèle), and la femme docteur for the female physician. Also, usage may be changing. One has to stay alert.

PHASE II - "LATER"

10) Nouns from Adjectives, etc.

Now for another "back-up" pattern (rule):

> Nouns from other parts of speech, principally adjectives, are masculine regardless of ending.

The pattern "takes care of" masculines ending in Mute (-e).

There is no problem with Non-Mute (-e) nouns from other parts of speech (including numbers,

colors and languages):

le réel	et	l' idéel(m)
l' essentiel(m)	et	le superflu
le pur	et	l' impur(m)
les bas(m)	et	les hauts(m)
l' extérieur(m)	et	l' intérieur(m)
l' immédiat(m)	et	l' infini(m)
le deux	et	le vingt
le premier	et	le second
le blanc	et	le bleu
l' anglais(m)	et	l' allemand(m)
le devoir	et	le pouvoir
le pourquoi	et	le comment
le dedans	et	le dehors

The back-up pattern is needed, however, with many Mute (-e) nouns. Here are some examples (including numbers, colors and languages):

General

Mute (-e)

le vague(PAIR)

l' anesthésique(m), l' antiseptique(m), le basque(PAIR), le cosmétique, l' économique(m)(PAIR), le périodique, le physique(PAIR), le pittoresque (grotesque), les plastiques(m)(PAIR), le politique(PAIR), le tchèque, l' unique(m)

and also, l' antique(m)(PAIR) (classique, comique, romantique, tragique, etc.)(see below)

le mille (mile)

le bizarre

le russe

l' arabe(m)

l' acide(m), le fluide, l' hybride(m), le liquide, le solide, le vide

le difficile (facile), le drôle (de), le mobile(I & II), le parallèle(PAIR), le ridicule, le sale,

le textile, l' utile(m)
le jaune, le profane
l' arrière(m), le bulgare, le derrière, le dire, le pire, le rare, le rire, le sourire
le grandiose, le rose(PAIR)
le bête(PAIR)
le grave, le mauve(PAIR)
le douze, le seize

Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e)

le postiche ("falsie")
le calme
l' étrange(m), l' orange(m)(PAIR), le onze(sic)(soixante, trente), le rance
l' absurde(m), l' inverse(m), le large, le moderne, le quatorze

* the words l' antique(m), le moderne, etc. in the context of arts and letters can apply to any or all of the following:
1) les artistes, partisans et savants
2) les caractères, objets d' art et ouvrages
3) les genres, goûts et styles;
l' antique(f) involves ellipsis: la (sculpture) antique.

Certain (-que) examples, such as les plastiques(m)(PAIR), are substances having the properties described by the adjective. L' économique(m)(PAIR) and le politique(PAIR) refer to "the economic" and "the political" in contrast to, say, "the religious" or "the ethical."

As feminines, these nouns refer to the plastic arts, economics and politics. There will be a "wrap-up" for (-que) nouns a little later.

Le périodique is like its English counterpart - "a periodical." Le mille, meaning "mile" in English (sometimes le mile) comes from the "thousand paces", a distance measure used by the

Romans. Le drôle (de) is used like an adjective, and takes the gender of the noun following the de, for example, la drôle de façon.

Le mobile changes meaning, depending on whether the thought is transitive or intransitive. If transitive, le mobile means motive power or motive. If intransitive, le mobile means whatever moves, like a moving sculpture.

Le mobile and le parallèle will help shortly with ellipsis. Here le parallèle means abstractly whatever is similar or comparable to something else, as in, "there are many parallels between the two episodes."

11) Ellipsis

Adjectives become nouns in another way. At times, adjectives modify missing nouns, and we have an "ellipsis."

Ellipsis means the omission of words necessary to complete a grammatical construction. In such cases, the adjective has the gender of the missing noun.

If the adjective appears alone in the feminine, ellipsis is often involved. For example, the expression à la française stands for à la (façon/manière/mode) française. As indicated, it is sometimes easier to know a noun has been dropped, than to be sure which noun.

Another example is la première. It can stand for la première (classe), la première (vitesse), la première (nuit/représentation) or la première (danseuse/vendeuse).

At the same time, le premier can stand for le premier (étage) or le premier (danseur/ministre). Le premier can also mean abstractly what-

ever is first in order or rank. In the latter case, ellipsis is not involved.

The adjectives parallèle and mobile are examples of the need to keep track of ellipsis. Parallèle can appear in at least three ways:

le parallèle	no ellipsis: parallel "abstractly"
le (cercle) parallèle	ellipsis: parallel of latitude, cf., Arctic Circle
la (ligne) parallèle	ellipsis: parallel line in geometry

Similarly, mobile can appear in at least two ways:

le mobile	no ellipsis: whatever moves
la (voiture) (auto)mobile, l' automobile(f), l' auto(f), cf., la voiture à cheval	the "self-moving" carriage, much like the early "horseless" carriage in English, cf., mobile home

Note also le (poste) central and la (station) centrale.

Adjectives for missing nouns are not frequent, but they do explain the gender of certain words. Here are some examples where ellipsis "takes care of" nouns that would otherwise be exceptions (sometimes the modifier is a phrase):

Non-Mute (-e)	le (navire à) vapeur(PAIR) la (société) Michelin, etc. la (voiture) jeep/"413"/deux cheveaux Citroen, etc. la (machine) dynamo(électrique)
General Mute (-e)	le (fromage (de)) brie/gruyère/ hollande (also, bleu d' Auvergne/ camembert)

le (pistolet/téléphone) automatique(PAIR)
le (cercle) arctique/tropique/ zodiaque (also, les tropiques(m))
le (ruban) élastique
le (appareil) frigorifique
le (diagramme/tableau) graphique
le (livre/récit) historique
le (muscle) oblique(PAIR)
les (jeux) olympiques(m)
le (boulevard) périphérique
le (orchestre) philharmonique
le (aspect) physique
le (bandage/express) pneumatique
le (avion) supersonique
le (fauteuil/navire) trans-atlantique
la (partie/somme) dîme (cf., tithe or tenth)
la (sentence) maxime
la (lettre/syllabe) penultième
la (partie/somme) prime
la (lettre) circulaire (cf., encyclique/patente)
la (ligne) perpendiculaire/ trajectoire
la (lettre/pièce) annexe (cf., la présente)
ERRATUM < la (ligne) bissectrice/~~perforatrice~~ (machine) calculatrice/perforatrice
le (train) rapide
le (cigare/tabac) havane
la (machine) linotype/stenotype
le (appareil/poêle) calorifère
le (drapeau) tricolore

Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e)

le (vin (de)) bourgogne/champagne/ falerne/grenache/madère/sancerre/ Côtes de Provence (cf., bordeaux/ porto)
le (habit) uniforme
la (ondulation) indéfrisable
la (quantité/somme) variable

Some of these examples are calculated guesses. Some are obvious. Many can be documented.

La (partie/somme) prime is particularly interesting. Once upon a time, premiums and profits seem to have avoided usury restrictions if they qualified as "prior" payments (cf., German der Vorteil - profit, benefit, gain, literally "fore part").

Ellipsis, like the "back-up" patterns, serves mainly to "take care of" masculines ending in Mute (-e).

12) "Wrap-Up" for (-que) Nouns

Here now is a "wrap-up" for the (-que) nouns. Most (-que) nouns are feminine, such as:

l' attaque(f)	la fabrique	la réplique
la banque	l' hypothèque	la république
la caractéristique	la marque	les statistiques
l' époque(f)	la panique	la tactique
	la pratique	la technique

Others are masculine exceptions, such as:

le chèque	le manque	le risque

Others are natural persons, often from adjectives, such as:

(s) Britannique	(s) domestique	le monarque
(s) catholique	l' évêque(m)	(s) scientifique
le critique	(s) fanatique	(s) Soviétique

Others are masculines from adjectives (often abstract in meaning; often to be contrasted with the feminine name for some system of knowledge, thought or skill), such as:

l' économique(m)	l' économique(f)
"the economic"	economics

le physique	la physique
"the physical"	physics
le politique	la politique
"the political"	politics, policy
l' antiseptique(m)	---
les plastiques(m)	---

Other (-que) nouns involve ellipsis, such as:

le (Océan)	la (Mer)
Atlantique	Adriatique
Pacifique	Baltique
le (muscle)	la (ligne)
oblique	oblique

le (pistolet/téléphone) automatique
le (boulevard) périphérique
le (avion) supersonique
le (fauteuil/navire) transatlantique

The (-que) nouns are a good summary of French gender. French nouns are either regular, or they are exceptions, or they are "taken care of" by a back-up pattern, or ellipsis is involved. The (-que) nouns illustrate all these possibilities, as follows:

1) regular (in this case, feminine)	la critique la politique
2) exception	le manque le risque
3) natural person	le critique le politique*
4) from other parts of speech	les plastiques(m) le politique
5) ellipsis	le (Océan) Pacifique la (Mer) Baltique

* "l' homme politique" is the more common usage for the natural person; in theory, every French adjective can be converted into a noun, as in 4), but in practice only a few are.

13) Chemical Elements and Compounds

Many nouns for chemical elements and compounds conform to the ending patterns for nouns generally.

There is a back-up pattern (rule) that "takes care of" the chemical elements that do not:

> Names of the chemical elements are masculine regardless of ending.

Some of the elements ending in Mute (-e) are the following:

l' antimoine(m)	l' iode(m)	le phosphore
l' azote(m)	le manganèse	le platine
le bore	le mercure	le tantale
le carbone	le molybdène	le tellure
le chlore	l' oxygène(m)	le titane
l' hydrogène(m)		le tungstène

This is the end of the back-up patterns. There are additional patterns in the chemical field, but the knowledge of a specialist is required. As a starter, chemical compounds with the following Mute (-e) endings seem to be masculine:

(-ide)(-yde)	le polyamide	le peroxyde
(-ile)(-yle)	le nitrile	le vinyle
(-ane)(-ène)	l' uréthane(m)	le propylène
(-ure)	le chlorure	les hydrocarbures
(-ate)(-ite)	le nitrate	le sulphite

Minerals ending in (-ite), however, are usually feminine (but, l' anthracite(m), le granit(e), le graphite, le lignite and le quartzite). Also, explosives ending in (-ite) are usually feminine (probably patterned after la dynamite).

Nouns like l' insecticide(m), les plastiques(m) and l' acide(m) have been covered earlier.

14) Balance of Basic List (Beyond Mini-List)

Noun usage is a matter of style, subject matter and setting. The balance of the basic list features exceptions more likely found in novels than in a business or "news" context.

The balance of the basic list follows:

Non-Mute (-e)	le poison le comté, le pâté
	la chanson les amours(f)(SPEC), la chair, la cuiller (cuillère) la dent, la dot la croix, la toux
	la paroi la peau, la tribu
General Mute (-e)	l' apogée(m) le parapluie le cantique, le colloque, le lexique, le disque (masque)
	le beurre, le parterre, le verre
	la cage, l' horloge(f)(loge), la nage, la plage la brume, la cime, la crème, l' écume(f), la lame, la paume, la plume la chaire, la grammaire l' armoire(f), la baignoire, la mâchoire l' artère(f) l' avarice(f), la cicatrice, les délices(f)(SPEC)(malice)

le tube
le pouce
le coude, le grade
l' asile(m), le châle, le crépuscule, l' évangile(m), le poêle (PAIR), le râle, l' ustensile(m), le vestibule, le voile(PAIR)
le crâne, le trône
le crêpe(PAIR), le participe
le cigare, le cimetière, le phare, le square, le store
le vase(PAIR)
le rite, le site

Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e)

le manche(PAIR), le panache
le peigne, le règne
le bronze, le conte, le linge
le germe, le torse, le vacarme, le verbe*

l' étable(f), les ténèbres(f)
la boucle, l' encre(f)
la cendre, la poudre
la gifle, la pantoufle
l' épingle(f)
l' orthographe(f)
la peste, la piste, la sieste, la veste
la vitre
la lèvre

* le contrepoison, le babeurre, l' adverbe(m) (proverbe), l' escarboucle(f)
(SPEC) les amours and les délices are feminine in the plural only; each noun is masculine in the singular.

15) Schematic Diagram

Subject to exceptions, French gender conforms to 17 noun-ending patterns, supplemented by three back-up or subject-matter patterns, as

follows:

A) Gender Determined by Ending -
Primary Screening for All Nouns

	Masculine	Feminine
Non-Mute (-e)		4) (-sion)(-tion)
		5) (-ison)
		6) (-eur) "S-Q-C" & Moisture
	1) Remainder	7) (-té)(-tié)
General Mute (-e)	8) (-ogue)	
	9) (-Vge)	
	10) (-Vme)	
	11) (-aire)(-oire)	
	12) (-tère)	
	13) (-Vxe)(-ice*)	2) Remainder
Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e)		14) (-che)
		15) (-gne)
		16) (-mbe)(-mpe)
		17) (-lKe)(-nKe)
	3) Remainder	(-rKe)

B) Back-Up Patterns - Seldom Apply
Except for Natural Persons

(limited to nouns that would otherwise be exceptions - primarily masculine Mute (-e) nouns classified as "regular" on the basis of meaning)

18) Natural Persons (Individuals)
19) Nouns from Adjectives, etc., incl. Ellipsis
20) Chemical Elements and Compounds

PHASE III - "IN TIME"

16) Gender Profiles

There follow six "gender profiles" to demonstrate the mini- and basic list in a business and "news" context. Each profile summarizes the

exceptions appearing in a given reading selection.

Five selections are very contemporary. For comparison, one selection is an 18th-Century "classic" of political and social commentary (and humor). The translated "Watergate selection" demonstrates the Guide's system in a context familiar to American anglophones.

The gender profiles also indicate:

1) noun usage is a matter of style, subject matter and setting;
2) only a limited number of exceptions will occur in a given context;
3) one need not master the entire language before functioning in a business and "news" context;
4) by the end of a first-year college course, one should have a good mastery of gender;
5) vocabulary development after first-year will depend on one's personal interests and requirements.

The six gender profiles are as follows:

a) Le Nouvel Economiste (business weekly) (29 May 1978) (108 pages)

A) Mini-List: 101 nouns from mini-list
B) Basic List (balance beyond mini-list) 21 nouns:

la chair	le beurre	le cigare
la dent	la crème	le vase(PAIR)
la peau	l' armoire(f)	le linge
la tribu	la baignoire	la poudre
le parapluie	la malice	l' épingle(f)
le colloque	le pouce	la peste
le disque	le trône	la veste

C) Advanced "Recurring" (beyond basic list and appearing on more than one page) three nouns:

(l' arrêté(m))	le score	l' éclipse(f)
	la cible	

D) From Other Parts of Speech (would be exceptions but for back-up rule) five nouns:

les plastiques(m)	le textile	le calme
	le pire	l' inverse(m)

E) Ellipsis (would be exceptions but for recognition of ellipsis) five nouns:

le (tableau/etc.) graphique	la (lettre/pièce) annexe
le (bandage) pneumatique	la (machine) calculatrice
le (partie/somme) prime	

b) Le Monde Diplomatique (news monthly - newspaper format) (January 1975, incl. supplement on Quebec) (44 pages)

A) Mini-List: 122 nouns from mini-list

B) Basic List (balance beyond mini-list) 23 nouns:

la chanson	la plume	le règne
la croix	la chaire	le germe
la peau	les délices(SPEC)	le verbe
l' apogée(m)	le tube	les ténèbres(f)
le colloque	le trône	la cendre
le beurre	le rite	l' épingle(f)
le verre	le site	la piste
la loge		la vitre

C) Advanced "Recurring" (beyond basic list and appearing on more than one page) 11 nouns:

la guérilla	l' exode(m)	le score
la diaspora	le groupuscule	l' amiante(m)
l' échappatoire(f)	le pôle	l' éclipse(f)
	le protocole	la caste

D) From Other Parts of Speech (would be exceptions but for back-up rule) nine nouns:

le vague(PAIR)	le ridicule	le dire
le mille	le textile	l' inverse(m)
le vide	l' arrière(m)	le large

E) Ellipsis (would be exceptions but for recognition of ellipsis) five nouns:

les (jeux) olympiques(m)	la (partie/somme) prime
les (cercles) tropiques(m)	la (lettre/pièce) annexe

le (vin (de)) champagne

c) Giscard d' Estaing, Démocratie Française (book) (160 pages)

A) Mini-List: 73 nouns from mini-list
B) Basic List (balance beyond mini-list) 11 nouns:

la dent	la plume	le germe
la tribu	la grammaire	la cendre
le masque	le grade	la peste
le verre		la lèvre

C) Advanced "Recurring" (beyond basic list and appearing on more than one page) one noun:
les antipodes(m)
D) From Other Parts of Speech (would be exceptions but for back-up rule) three nouns:

le vide	le pire	l' inverse(m)

E) Ellipsis (would be exceptions but for recognition of ellipsis) none.

d) DeGaulle, Mémoires de Guerre, L' Appel 1940 - 1942 (book) (427 pages)

A) Mini-List: 108 nouns from mini-list
B) Basic List (balance beyond mini-list) 21 nouns:

la croix	la plage	le site
la peau	la brume	le conte
la tribu	le grade	les ténèbres(f)
le masque	le voile(PAIR)	la boucle
le verre	le cigare	la poudre
l' horloge(f)	le délire	l' épingle(f)
la nage	le rite	la piste

C) Advanced "Recurring" (beyond basic list and appearing on more than one page) nine nouns:

l' oasis(f)	l' exode(m)	l' ancre(f)
la guérilla	le plébiscite	l' escadre(f)
(sans ambages)	(sans/en relâche(PAIR))	la riposte

D) From Other Parts of Speech (would be exceptions but for back-up rule) eight nouns:

le mille	le pire	le sourire
le vide	le rire	le calme
l' arrière(m)		le large

E) Ellipsis (would be exceptions but for recog-

nition of ellipsis) five nouns:

le (livre/récit) historique	le (drapeau) tricolore
la (partie/somme) prime	le (habit) uniforme
la (lettre/pièce) annexe	

e) Woodward & Berstein, Les Derniers Jours de Nixon (book) (442 pages)

A) Mini-List: 123 nouns from mini-list
B) Basic List (balance beyond mini-list) 32 nouns:

la dent	le tube	le vacarme
la croix	le pouce	le verbe
la peau	le coude	la boucle
l' apogée(m)	le grade	la cendre
le disque	le crépuscule	la gifle
le masque	l' ustensile(m)	l' épingle(f)
le verre	le vestibule	la piste
la plage	le manche(PAIR)	la sieste
la lame	le linge	la veste
la plume	le germe	la vitre
l' armoire(f)		la lèvre

C) Advanced "Recurring" (beyond basic list and appearing on more than one page) 11 nouns:

la datcha	l' échappatoire(f)	l' embarcadère(m)
la paranoïa		
le casque	le prélude	le suspense
le portique	le protocole	l' éclipse(f)
	le polygone	

D) From Other Parts of Speech (would be exceptions but for back-up rule) 12 nouns:

le vague(PAIR)	l' arrière(m)	le rire
le mile(mille)	le derrière	le sourire
le vide	le dire	le calme
le ridicule	le pire	l' absurde(m)

E) Ellipsis (would be exceptions but for recognition of ellipsis) three nouns:

le (aspect) physique	le (habit) uniforme
la (lettre) circulaire	

f) Voltaire, Candide ou L' Optimisme (book) (130 pages)

A) Mini-List: 77 nouns from mini-list
B) Basic List (balance beyond mini-list) 24 nouns:

la chanson	les délices(SPEC)	le conte
la chair	le pouce	le linge
la dent	l' asile(m)	l' étable(f)
la toux	le voile(PAIR)	la cendre
la peau	le crâne	la poudre
le cantique	le trône	l' épingle(f)
la plume	le cimetière	la peste
l' armoire(f)	le vase(PAIR)	la lèvre

C) Advanced "Recurring" (beyond basic list and appearing on more than one page) six nouns:

la rançon	le singe	la mitre
le carrosse		la piastre

D) From Other Parts of Speech (would be exceptions but for back-up rule) seven nouns:

le mille	l' utile(m)	le rire
l' arabe(m)	le derrière	le sourire
	le pire	

E) Ellipsis (would be exception but for recognition of ellipsis) one noun:
la (sentence)
maxime

17) Notes for Further Study & Advanced List for Businessmen, etc.

There is no magic to further study except practice - in a subject or setting that interests you. Once you know the vocabulary you want to master, you can build your own list of advanced exceptions.

Generally, the advanced exceptions occur with low frequency - on about one page per 1,000 or less. Still there are some that gravitate toward a business or "news" setting. These have been collected in a special advanced list.

The special list can also serve as a model for others who may be more interested, say, in

the history of church architecture.

A further note before the special advanced list. Somewhat surprisingly, exceptions representing the names of "plants, trees, animals and parts thereof" (except la fleur) do not occur with much frequency in general reading.

At the same time, the nomenclature for la flore et la faune(PAIR) has a high concentration of exceptions. These exceptions are not listed in the Guide. If the Guide had focused on romantic poetry, the listings might be different.

The special advanced list for businessmen, civil servants and social scientists is as follows:

Non-Mute (-e)	le bastion
	le labeur
	(l' arrêté(m))*
	la cuisson, la rançon
	l' oasis(f)
	la guérilla, la razzia, la vendetta, la vodka*
General Mute (-e)	la synagogue
	le trophée
	le casque (kiosque)
	le greffe(PAIR)
	le bidonville
	le leurre, le tintamarre
	le colosse
	(sans ambages)*
	la trame
	l' aire(f)
	l' échappatoire(f)
	la rixe
	la matrice, la milice, la notice

le cube
le négoce, le sacerdoce
l' exode(m), le prélude*, le subside
le concile, le dédale, le moule(PAIR), le pendule(PAIR), le pôle, le préambule, le projectile, le protocole
le polygone*
l' augure(m), le drugstore, le folklore, l' hemisphère(m)*, le martyre(PAIR), le repère, le score, le software
le diocèse
l' antidote(m), l' automate(m), le gîte, le parachute*, le plébiscite
le conclave

Mixed-Consonant Mute (-e)

le fantoche, le pastiche
le branle

la cible, la fibre
la débâcle, la secte
l' escadre(f)
la rafle
l' énigme(f), la pègre
l' éclipse(f)*
la caste, la riposte

* l' arrêté(m) seems to come from a participial adjective, so may be covered by back-up rule; nouns ending in (-a) and recently borrowed from Romance, Semitic & Slavic languages tend to be feminine (but note le cinéma is from Greek); a number of advanced exceptions appear in such a manner that gender is not important, such as:
(sans ambages) (les arcanes)
(sans rime) ni raison (sans/en relâche (PAIR))
(en lice) (les affres)
(les prémices) (sans/en conteste);
(les antipodes)
l' interlude(m)(postlude); le pentagone (hexagone, etc.); (but la sphère, etc.); (but la chute), l' éllipse(f)(apocalypse).

The Guide does not cover hyphenated nouns or proper names, but some guidance can be offered. Hyphenated nouns tend to be masculine unless a feminine noun is dominant, such as in:

la contre-attaque	la quote-part
la machine-outil	la volte-face
la main-d' oeuvre	

As for proper names, most countries are regular except for l' Haute-Volta(f), le Mexique, la Norvège and l' Egypte(f)(cf., la crypte).

You should also be alert to the following masculine diminutives formed from masculine nouns:

l' animal(m)	l' animalcule(m)
le corps	le corpuscule
le couvent	le conventicule
le faisceau	le fascicule
le globe	le globule
le grain	le granule
le groupe	le groupuscule
le mode(PAIR)	le module
le mont	le monticule
le noeud	le nodule
l' opéra(m)	l' opuscule(m)
le rets	le réticule
le ventre	le ventricule

La capsule, la formule, la molécule, la particule and la pellicule are diminutives formed from feminine nouns.

18) "Le Pourquoi et Le Comment" of the Mute (-e) Masculines

In modern French, feminine is the gender of special endings (and meanings), as follows:

(-sion)(-tion), etc.
(-ison)

(-eur) "S-Q-C"
& Moisture
(-té)(-tié)
Feminine Mute (-e):
General Mute (-e) less
six groups, plus
(-che)
(-gne)
(-mbe)(-mpe)
(-lKe)(-nKe)(-rKe)
Natural Persons:
Female Feminine
Figurative Feminine
Ellipsis and Feminine Adjectives

The trick is to take the Mute (-e) nouns, and strip out the masculines by a combination of patterns and exceptions. Most of the Guide is devoted to just that.

The Mute (-e) nouns are a challenge because there are four kinds of Mute (-e) endings in modern French, as follows:

1) the Mute (-e) is, first of all, a routine "signal" for the feminine, comparable to the feminine (-a) found in Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

2) the Mute (-e) also serves as a stand-in for old non-feminine endings. For example, French has converted "discus" into "le disque," and "museum" into "le musée."

3) the Mute (-e) also appears as a special ending for alien nouns borrowed from other languages, such as:

dilemma(Greek)	le dilemme
diploma(Greek)	le diplôme
risco(Italian)	le risque
golfo(Italian)	le golfe
cigarro(Span.)	le cigare
cheque(Engl.)	le chèque
magazine(Engl.)	le magazine

4) the Mute (-e) also serves as a <u>combined masculine-feminine ending for adjectives</u> which end up as nouns, such as:

(s) Britannique
(s) domestique
(s) invalide
(s) jeune
le pittoresque
le difficile

Because of "no. 2" above, Mute (-e) nouns with an English "relative" ending in (-us) or (-um) are often (but not always) masculine, such as:

le lycée	lyceum
le musée	museum
le colloque	colloquium
le disque	discus
le mode(PAIR)	"modus operandi"
le remède	like "medium" (plur., "media")
le stade	stadium
l' asile(m)	asylum
le modèle	modulus
le pétrole	petroleum
le style	stylus
le crâne	cranium
le domaine	(con)dominium
l' organe(m)	Bacon's "Novum Organum"
le principe	Newton's "Principia" (plur. for -um, like "media")
le délire	delirium
l' empire(m)	imperium
le site	situs
le règne	(inter)regnum
le signe	(in)signia (plur. for -um, like "media")
le dividende	like "addendum" and "referendum"

le genre	genus
le terme	terminus

Other examples include: le génie, le mausolée, le cirque, le bacille, le colosse, le narcisse, l' exode(m), le dédale, le pendule(PAIR), le platine and le gymnase.

The same thing has happened with other nouns, except the (-us) and (-um) endings have been lost in English as well as in French. Look up in a dictionary, for example, the origins of the English words related to: l' incendie(m), l' intervalle(m), le globe, le domicile and le patrimoine.

The dropping of the old non-feminine endings is merely one part of the "streamlining" process that has made modern French. Other parts of the process include:

1) the dropping of syllables and letters without trace;
2) the dropping of letters (often, but not always, an "s") in favor of an accent;
3) the dropping of sounds to produce silent endings;
4) contractions, "compacted" words and elision;
5) the dropping of modified nouns in favor of their modifiers (usually an adjective) to produce ellipsis; and
6) the muting of the old feminine (-a) ending to produce the feminine Mute (-e).

In summary, French gender is largely a matter of word form. The forms have been scrambled a bit, but the system is really quite simple. This is probably why people who know French well have a "feel" or sixth sense about gender. Just watch those four kinds of Mute (-e) endings.

The French experience with alien words may also be a clue to why English nouns usually have no gender (except for natural persons). With French, the alien nouns were absorbed gradually and in limited numbers, and the dominant "home" system largely survived.

English began, however, as a 1)rapid combination of 2) two unlike languages (Germanic and Romance) with 3) neither dominant. Alien nouns test a gender system, and in England the differences may have been overwhelming.

The most interesting question, of course, is: "Why gender, in the first place?" That is beyond this Guide.